

A STUDY OF SOURCES OF EFL STUDENT TEACHERS' ANXIETY DURING THEIR PRACTICUM EXPERIENCE

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed at exploring the different sources of anxiety EFL student- teachers experience while doing their practicum courses. Data were collected through student-teacher's daily diaries and through the discussion between the student teachers and their university supervisor during the weekly meetings. The study revealed that EFL student teachers reflected different sources of anxiety; the main ones are classroom management, time management, lesson planning, being observed, and fluency in language. Some recommendations were made at the end of the study.

Keywords: EFL, student teacher, anxiety, practicum, mentors, supervisor.

INTRODUCTION

During the twentieth and the twenty first centuries the English language has been used as the first international communication tool. Therefore, teaching English has become an educational field which is worthwhile investigating within the general educational system in any country. Studies in teaching English deal with various issues and all of these issues are somehow related to the education of English teachers. Enginarlar (1996), the dissatisfaction with the quality of English teaching is generally attributed to teacher education programs at universities, and one of these essential programs is the "practicum", in which last year student teachers observe mentor teachers in real classrooms and do practice teaching to real students, has an enormous impact on improving the quality of teachers and language teaching as a result. As stated by many researchers (Clarke & Collins, 2007; Farrell, 2008; Cruickshank & Westbrook, 2013), one of the most important components of English teacher education programs is practicum that gives student teachers a good chance to become aware of the realistic nature for the profession of teaching (Slick, 1998; Intrator, 2006), and the development of pre-service teachers before they go on to the actual teaching profession. Because of its critical nature, which is affected by many factors including those stemming from the student teacher, teacher educator and co-operating teacher, practicum has received considerable research interest in recent years. One highly studied issue is the sources of concerns and stress experienced by pre-service teachers (Guillaume & Rodney, 1993; Mau, 1997; D'Rozario & Wong, 1998; Kyriacou & Stephens, 1999; Murray-Harvey, et al., 2000).

Successful practicum application entitles a stress-free atmosphere not only for student teachers but also for all the others directly involved with the practicum (i.e., school administration, mentors, student teachers and supervisors). By understanding the sources of anxiety student teachers experience during their teaching experience an effective practicum environment can be created in order to reduce anxiety student teachers feel. However, the current study aims to reveal the sources of anxiety for Palestinian EFL student teachers during their practicum experience.

Significance of the study

Teaching practice has come to be recognized as one of the most important aspects of the teacher education program (Farrell, 2003). Much evidence points to the value of preserve student teaching due to the realistic nature of the experience (Slick, 1998). Research examining student teacher practicum reveals that the practicum component of a teacher training program has an important impact on his future career. (Myles, Cheng, & Wang, 2006; Rozelle & Wilson, 2012). Although there has been a considerable amount of research on teacher learning in the general education field in English language teaching (e.g., Tang, 2002; Graham, 2006; Allen, 2009; O'Neill & Stephenson, 2012). Insufficient data on what exactly takes place during the time of teaching practicum, particularly practicum experiences undertaken by non-native ESL teacher candidates (Farrell, 2003). The scenario in Palestinian schools is not far from this. Furthermore, very few studies conducted in Palestine to examine the sources of anxiety student teachers have.

The purpose of the current study is, to investigate the sources of anxiety EFL student teachers face. This paper outlines the perceptions of a number of student teachers indifferent schools during a four-week teaching practicum experience.

Aims of the study

The purpose of the current study is to investigate the sources of anxiety EFL student teachers face during their teaching experience. As such, this study will attempt to answer the following question:

What are the factors that lead to anxiety among Palestinian EFL student teachers during their teaching experience?

Practicum at the Arab American University of Jenin (AAUJ)

Practicum is an experience that requires the practical application of theory or conceptual knowledge. These 6 credit hour courses is given to TEFL students who seek a diploma in methods of teaching English. The courses go in three stages:

1-Observation Stage: At this stage, the student teacher is expected to spend a week (25 hours) at the cooperative school where he is given the chance to observe the school environment, and the classes with a teacher or more than one teacher in order to be aware of the process of teaching. He will also observe in-class and outside practices and activities. The aim of this stage is to become acquainted with school life in general. Wallace (1991) maintained that observation does not simply mean watching classes. The trainee should have a practical experience in which he/she responds to a number of tasks related to various important aspects of school life (p.83).

2-Participation stage: At this stage, the student teacher spends a week also (25 hours) in practicing educational tasks and activities inside and outside classroom. For example, he/she is advised to participate at school committees and their activities, write and conduct lesson planning, prepare worksheets, take class attendance and do some partial teaching, an activity or more in the presence of the mentor. Such participation can be performed independently or with the help of the cooperative teacher. During this stage, the university practicum supervisor visits the student to give guidelines and orientation that can help the student

teacher improve the educational practices and to cooperate in school activities. Furthermore, the encouragement the student teacher needs.

3- Actual practice: At this stage, which lasts two weeks (50 hours), the real practices of teaching start, the student teacher is to be familiar with the multiple tasks of a classroom teacher. Wallace (1991) named this stage "the teaching practice) and defined it as the opportunity given to the trainee to develop and improve her/his professional practice in the context of a real classroom, usually under some form of guidance or supervision (p.121). The student teacher is given the opportunity to practice teaching in real teaching situations where he/she plans, writes behavioral objectives, teaches, uses different methods of teaching, uses different types of audio-visual aids, evaluates, and gives feedback. During this stage, the university practicum supervisor visits the student teacher for the second time in order to evaluate and assess his/her performance in class.

The Evaluation Process: Student teacher evaluation process goes as follows. University supervisor has to visit each student teacher at least two times. The first visit is dedicated to encourage him, her, gives him/ her feedback, check lesson planning, teaching aids, work sheets.....etc. the second visit is to evaluate his/her performance. A schedule is designed by the university supervisor for this task; it consists of three parts, (pre-teaching part, while teaching part, and post teaching part). Mentors and principals are also part of the process; they attend student teachers classes and participate in their evaluation. Student teacher Portfolio is a major aspect in this process, each student teacher, has a portfolio in which daily planning, a daily dairy, teaching aids, charts, CDs and a report about the whole period should be included.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Practicum courses and other field-based experiences are key components of teacher preparation programs (Palmer, 1995; Richards & Farrell, 2011).

Korukçu (1996) found that pre-service teachers identified classroom management, teaching methods, lesson planning and motivation of students as the causes of stress. Numrich (1996) who revealed that the most significant stress-generating factors are related to time management, giving clear directions, responding to students' various needs, teaching grammar and assessing students' learning. Baker et al. (2002) conducted a study to identify Classroom Management problems and coping strategies generated by the teachers. The possible CM problems and their possible solutions were categorized under the following titles: time and energy, classroom constraints, reading levels and language skills, student immaturity, safety concerns, required thinking skills, sequencing, support, and materials management. Kim and Kim (2004) that TTs feel stress while speaking English throughout the lesson, teaching speaking and listening skills, having classes with unmotivated and interested students, not being able to manage the class properly and being observed. It was also found that not being prepared enough for the lesson, limited English proficiency, lack of confidence, fear of negative evaluation and lack of teaching experience are the causes of stress.

Merç's (2004) study showed that the major reasons of stress are related to their previous experience, overcrowded classrooms, the feeling of incompetence, being observed by the supervisor and the mentor, being recorded, using a new teaching technique, managing the time effectively and not knowing the students.

Vanci Osam and Balbay (2004) investigated the decision-making skills of cooperating teachers and STs. The outcomes of the study showed that while timing and CM were major motives for student teachers to make shifts in their plans, cooperating teachers were more concerned about discipline problems. The student teachers in the study indicated that they had to make immediate decisions related to CM quite often.

Hindi (2006): in this study the researchers want to know the problems that face the student-teacher in Al-Hashmeia University through the teaching practice period. The results showed that the most practical educational problems that face the student- teacher are the problems related to the cooperative school, the supervision on the practical education, the teaching practice program, the applied curriculum in school and the cooperative school students. Reupert and Woodcock (2010) found that classroom management is the most serious cause of stress for student teachers. Likewise, it is indicated that student teachers feel stressed out about their abilities in managing the time and the class (Murray-Harvey, Slee, Lawson, Silins, Banfield, & Russell, 2000).

Merç (2011) listed main sources of stress as follows: classroom management, being observed, students' profiles, teaching procedures and mentors. Paker (2011) listed the following stress-generating factors for TTs: staff relations, classroom management, pedagogy and evaluation, the way student teachers are assessed, different expectations of mentors and supervisors as well as the poor quality of feedback received from mentors and supervisors. Inceçay and Dollar (2012) analyzed two interrelated aspects: the efficacy of pre- service teachers and its relation to their readiness to manage their classrooms. Furthermore, the relationship among their efficacy beliefs, CM readiness and their implementation in a real teaching environment was also examined. The findings of the study indicated that there was a statistically significant relationship between the pre-service teachers' CM efficacy and their readiness to manage the challenging classroom behaviors. Moreover, no significant difference was found in the implementation of CM skills of pre-service teachers in a real teaching environment

Zhengdong (2013) investigated the challenges face non-native pre service ESL teachers in the Bachelor of Education (English Language) in an eight-week teaching practicum. Results indicated that the pre service teachers' practicum was characterized by a reality shock due to difficulties in experimenting with pedagogical practices they were taught in the BA program, and a lack of sense of control in class. Inadequacy in English language competence also appeared to affect the student teachers' teaching performance and how they established and maintained their teacher role and relationship with their students. It can be noted from the previous studies that:

- Student teachers experience different sources of anxiety during their practicum courses.
- time management, classroom management, speaking English during the lesson, lesson planning, evaluating of students, teaching methods, being observed, are the more common sources of anxiety revealed by studies.
- Classroom management as a source of anxiety is more investigated than other sources.
- Some studies reflected that the process of evaluation is a major source of anxiety for student teachers.
- No studies were conducted in Palestine related to teaching practicum in particular.

- Almost all studies agree on the different sources of anxiety related to the teaching practicum.

METHODOLOGY

Participants: Twenty two (22) student teachers from The Arab American University Faculty of Arts & Sciences Participated in this study during the academic year 2014-2015. They were Diploma students enrolled in the “Teaching Practicum” courses as part of their graduation requirement. During the teaching practicum, the student teachers were observed by the cooperating teachers, and principals. The university academic supervisor visited them at least two times during their 4 week practicum experience in order to evaluate their performance.

Data collection: All the 22 student teachers were asked to keep daily diaries during their teaching practicum. The participants submitted their diaries to the university supervisor at the end of the practicum period. They were also informed that the diaries they kept would be used for research purposes, and were part of evaluating their performance in the teaching practice course. In order to triangulate the data collection, and to provide further validation to the collected data, researcher asked all participants to discuss the period they spent at schools and reflect the main sources of anxiety they felt during their practicum experience.

Results: The daily diary of the student teachers showed that EFL student teachers suffered from different sources of anxiety, such as time management, classroom management, use of educational technology, speaking English throughout the lesson, being observed, lesson planning, teaching procedures, teaching different levels, providing evaluation and feedback, subject knowledge, school environment, overcrowded classes, unmotivated students, lack of support, but almost all student teachers agreed on the following sources of anxiety:

Classroom management: is defined as a set of techniques and skills that allow a teacher to control students effectively in order to create a positive learning environment for all students, Sternberg & William (2010). The analysis of the diary entries revealed that student teachers were highly anxious about classroom management issues. Student teachers expressed their fear from entering the class and maintaining discipline all through the whole period. Classroom management involved dealing with misbehavior, as well as establishing rules and routines, among a host of other teacher activities. This sounds logical as this is their first experience in teaching and dealing with students from different backgrounds and different levels. Although, there was a long and deep discussion over this point and other points was made during the weekly meeting with the supervisor. Students were advised to apply some strategies to decrease this anxiety, such as, self management strategies, as ‘appropriate rewards; provide attention, specific activities designed to teach self –regulation’. The fact that classroom management was quite difficult for student teachers is not surprising, real teachers still have this anxiety all over the world as they deal with kids or teenagers.

Lesson planning: “It is in planning that teachers translate syllabus guidelines, institutional expectations and their own beliefs and ideologies of education into guidelines for action in the classroom” (Calderhead 1984: 69). It seems that teachers are guided in their planning and teaching by broad intentions, intuition, tacit knowledge, and lesson images (Calderhead 1989, Doyle 1990, Eraut 1994, John 2000). When teachers plan lessons, the following points are worth considering: objectives and connection with the previous lesson, teaching aids, technology, activities, methodology, time, and feedback provided, organization of the classroom (i.e. pair- and group-work, whole-class instruction) , homework assignments and teachers notes.

Lesson planning is very important for all teachers, especially new teachers. It helps them to conduct the lesson in an orderly fashion and it allows students to know what they are going to be learning and how it fits into the syllabus. Students also feel that the lessons are sequenced properly. Having a good lesson plan will also increase confidence in the teacher; on the other hand, not having a plan will result in complete failure for both teacher and students. In addition, a detailed plan clearly demonstrates that the teacher has taken the time, as well as, put in the thought and effort into making the lesson.

Student teachers reflected that planning daily lesson plans is a very stressful point for them. They all agreed that this process requires experience, and this experience is almost very new for them. The success in this process means giving a good lesson. Among the difficulties involved in lesson planning, writing correct educational aims, timing, procedures for fulfilling each aim, evaluation, notes and more. The diary showed that students had difficulties in writing correct educational aims, and the right procedure to fulfill the aim.

Fluency in language: According to Hartmann and Stork (1976, p. 86), "A person is said to be a fluent speaker of a language when he can use its structures accurately whilst concentrating on content rather than form, using the units and patterns automatically at normal conversational speed when they are needed." Fillmore (1979) proposed that fluency includes the abilities to: Fill time with talk [i.e., to talk without awkward pauses for a relatively long time], talk in coherent, reasoned, and "semantically dense" sentences, have appropriate things to say in a wide range of contexts, and be creative and imaginative in using the language.

Despite studying English for quite a long time, EFL students are still hesitant in speaking English. They cannot express themselves fluently and effectively.

Speaking can cause high anxiety level and the reason for this is that teachers often expect beginners to perform beyond their acquire competence." This level of anxiety is observed in the classroom. For FEL student teachers lack the opportunity to practice the language, except at the university. School students always prefer teachers to speak their language during the language class. Within some time it becomes easier for teachers not to speak English, unfortunately, this phenomenon is quite normal in Palestinian schools. The same can be said to student teachers.

Time management: is the act of planning the amount of time the teacher spends on the lesson activities. Student teachers need to time the classroom activities and tasks in their lesson plans before delivering a lesson. A student teacher indicated her concern about time management as follows: "I always have long lists of things to accomplish in my lesson but, time doesn't allow me in achieve them." This happens with almost all student teachers and new teachers. They prepare activities to do during their lessons, but they discover that time is not enough to cover them all. It may be due to the different levels they have in the same class, and the lack of experience in covering the material needed to be covered in each class. The disruptive behavior of some students does not help student teachers to have classes that run smoothly. It is vital that we should learn to work both effectively and efficiently in order to overcome the problem of time management. Effective time management is the key to high performance levels.

Effective time management not only affects the productivity of teacher, but also helps to cope with stress, conflicts and pressure more efficiently. It also helps to maintain a healthy

work-life balance and keeps teacher and students motivated. Time management training is one of the most effective tools to enhance the productivity of the teachers.

Being observed: The analysis of the student teachers' daily diaries, showed that they were experiencing a level of anxiety when they were supposed to be observed by their supervisor, mentors or principals while teaching. Observing their teaching and commenting on their performance, almost all students indicated in their diaries that their university supervisor's existence caused quite a high level of anxiety just before the class time. This seems logical as they evaluate them and grade them according to their performance. They indicated that even the existence of the university supervisor there, although they know him/her very well, caused great anxiety and even caused in physical reactions such as sweating, shaking hands, trembling voice, etc. The following extract from a student teacher's experience about her stress when she was about to be observed would be enough to clarify the issue:

"Although I prepared my lesson well, the presence of the supervisor made me sweating, trembling, forgetting the examples and sentences I prepared for this lesson."

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATION

The core of this study is to investigate the sources of anxiety EFL student teachers at the Arab American University have while doing their practicum courses. Based on the daily diaries student teachers wrote during their teaching practice, the study tried to shed light on these sources of anxiety with the aim of helping EFL student teachers to overcome such sources in the classroom. The results of the study indicated that EFL student teachers generally had a feeling of anxiety in classroom management, time management, lesson planning, being observed and fluency in language.

The findings agree with different studies listed in the literature review, such as, Koruku (1996), Numrich (1996), Baker et al. (2002), Vanci Osam and Balbay (2004), Kim and Kim (2004), Reupert and Woodcock (2010), Merc (2011), Paker (2011), İnceçay and Dollar (2012), and Zhengdong (2013). The reasons why EFL student teachers have such sources of anxiety is due to the lack of experience in teaching. There is no doubt that experience in teaching is considered as the most important element for a teacher, besides other elements such as, training, good preparation, and teaching aids in order to reduce sources of anxiety. Sometimes the language they are teaching and their teaching skills and strategies at some other times. The nature of the student teaching with all elements of teaching practicum included (e.g. supervisors, students to be taught, peers) are also effective factors in the anxiety experienced by student teachers.

Therefore, some measures have to be taken to alleviate the student teachers' anxiety levels; and this responsibility is loaded to the student teachers themselves and the ones who supervise practice teaching, as Horwitz (1996) also suggested.

CONCLUSION AND FUTURE RECOMMENDATION

Due to the crucial importance of practicum experience in developing the educational competencies of student-teachers, this study attempted to highlight student-teachers' sources of anxiety while doing their practicum courses in order to reduce the sources of anxiety, which no doubt benefit student teachers a lot in having a more fruitful experience. The findings of this study showed EFL student teachers have suffered from several sources of

anxiety; the main ones are classroom management, time management, lesson planning, being observed and fluency in language. According to MacDonald (1992), when the concerns of student teachers are taken into consideration in a teacher education program, it is quite probable to reach a more meaningful and relevant practicum experience for student teachers. The findings seemed logical as joining teaching for the first time is a very tiring task. All novice teachers reflected this and expressed that teaching is not an easy mission. Furthermore the studies conducted in different parts of the world supported these findings. What is important now is to make such courses more beneficial, more interesting and as a result reduce the different sources of anxiety student teachers feel. The following recommendations can help in this regard.

1. More cooperation between the university and the co-operating schools should be made. A meeting or even more should be held before sending student teachers to the co-operating schools, in order to discuss thoroughly the main aspects which concern the period of training.
2. Training mentors and principals in the criteria needed for a more successful and effective evaluation. Cooperating teachers, play a key role in teacher training. Some student teachers in the study reported benefiting from their cooperating teachers to deal with some of the problems; the amount is not in the expected level. Therefore, Cooperating teachers should better serve the Student Teachers in their journey to become real teachers by providing them the opportunity to both explicitly stating the right strategies and giving them a chance to discuss and implement those strategies in their teaching.
3. Discussing thoroughly the criteria employed in evaluating student teachers are before starting their practicum period. This will make student teachers more aware of the different aspects needed in order to get better results.
4. It is vital for teacher education programs to make connections between theoretical and methodological issues. The best place for this type of education is the methodology courses where student teachers are introduced to language teaching methodologies, several teaching and classroom techniques. Halbach (2000) states that it is quite important to find an appropriate teaching methodology in teacher education courses since student teachers are likely to take teacher trainers' teaching behaviors as models for their own teaching.
5. Emphasizing the reflection component to the teaching practicum which provides student teachers with opportunities to discuss their teaching experience what they have learnt throughout their education (Merç, 2004). The importance of reflection as a part of teaching practicum is emphasized within the idea that when student teachers are given the opportunity to reflect on their teaching behavior, they are also given the chance to evaluate their teaching and develop their decision making skills Gebhard (1990). Student teachers' reflecting on their practicum experiences enhances their learning since it gives them the opportunity to identify what is significant to them about their classroom experiences. Bearing all these in mind, reflection can be a chance for reduced levels of anxiety and a stress-free teaching practicum.

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